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SUBJECT: TWO YEARS IN PRISON FOR INSULTING LUKASHENKO

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for Reasons 1.4 (d).

Summary

¶1. (SBU) In a politically motivated trial observed by Poloff, a Minsk court sentenced a 60-year-old human rights activist Yekaterina Sadovskaya to two years in prison for allegedly insulting President Lukashenko by demanding he be subjected to a mental examination. The court also fined her USD 1,860 for allegedly insulting and threatening a judge. Sadovskaya has a long history of human rights work in Belarus, particularly in defending the rights of military servicemen and their families. End summary.

Prosecution Secures a Conviction Despite Lack of Proof

¶2. (U) On October 23, Minsk District Court sentenced human rights activist Yekaterina Sadovskaya to two years in prison allegedly for insulting Lukashenko and for threatening and insulting Nadezhda Chmara, a judge in Mogilev, earlier this year. The court also ordered Sadovskaya to pay USD 1,860 (BYR 4 million) in damages to Chmara. Police arrested Sadovskaya in July, sent her to a mental hospital for an examination, and then transferred her to Volodarskogo pretrial detention center until the trial.

¶3. (U) The two-year prison sentence was punishment for a letter that Sadovskaya drafted in January which insulted Lukashenko's honor and dignity by calling for a mental examination of the president. According to human rights organization Charter 97, Sadovskaya admitted to writing the letter but never distributed it. The authorities found the letter when they were searching her house.

¶4. (C) Sadovskaya's fine was compensation to Chmara for alleged threats and insults. Chmara insisted that Sadovskaya had been involved with the threatening letters that Chmara had received and an insulting message that had been left on Chmara's answering machine. (Note: According to United Civic Party deputy Lyudmila Gryaznova, Chmara is a devout Lukashenko follower and appeared to be mentally unstable during her testimony on October 18. End note.) However, Sadovskaya's family members told Poloff, who was observing the trial, that the prosecutor never provided the alleged threat letters to the defense. Gryaznova noted that Sadovskaya's defense lawyer did not actively challenge the prosecution's questionable assertions and provided little argumentation in support of his client's case, which suggests that the regime co-opted the defense lawyer. In her closing statement, Sadovskaya denied that she had threatened Chmara and described the trial as "political."

Sadovskaya's Long Record of Human Rights Activities

¶5. (SBU) Sixty year-old Sadovskaya has devoted most of her life to human rights work. She is the regional head of the human rights organization "Veche" and a chair of the association "Zashchitnik" (Defender), which defends the rights of draftees, military servicemen and their families. According to Gryaznova, Sadovskaya has criticized Lukashenko's policies, particularly with respect to compulsory military service. Sadovskaya also cares for her elderly mother and her disabled husband.

Comment

¶6. (C) The prosecution and conviction of Sadovskaya represents the most recent example of the GOB's manipulation of the legal system to punish anyone and everyone who criticizes the regime and its leader. The ease with which the prosecution was able to secure a conviction without proof plainly demonstrates the sham of a judiciary that operates in Belarus.
Stewart